# A SCRIPTURAL INSTRUCTION MANUAL

*Book Eleven*

## STEWARDSHIP, GIVING, AND SEPARATION

*What Scripture Actually Defines — Come Out and Be Separate*

*"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give;*

*not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."*

## 2 Corinthians 9:7

"*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*"

**2 Corinthians 6:17**

Established Upon the Authority of Holy Scripture

**King James Version**

## Preface: What We Do with What We Have and Where We Stand

How a believer handles money and how a believer relates to the surrounding world are not peripheral questions. They go to the heart of where the heart actually is. The man whose treasure is in his giving reveals where his

treasure lies (Matthew 6:21). The community whose worship has been shaped by borrowed cultural forms has revealed what it actually worships.

Book Eleven addresses two subjects that are frequently distorted in opposite directions:

- Financial stewardship (Chapters One through Four): The biblical definition of the tithe has been systematically misrepresented in the contemporary church in ways that produce financial coercion, false guilt, and the misapplication of Old Covenant passages to New Covenant believers. This book states what Scripture actually says — about the tithe, about New Testament giving, about the support of ministers, and about the prosperity-gospel distortions that have damaged congregations across the world.
- Separation and syncretism (Chapters Five through Seven): The command to come out and be separate is among the most consistent threads in the biblical narrative, from Leviticus to Revelation. It has been distorted in two directions: by those who treat it as a mandate for cultural isolation and the rejection of all engagement with the world, and by those who have so accommodated the culture that the distinctiveness the command requires has been entirely lost. Both distortions harm the church and its witness. The method is the same throughout: what does Scripture actually say? Not what has tradition added, not what has institutional pressure required, not what cultural convenience permits — but what does the text, read carefully in its covenantal context, actually establish?

## Part One: Stewardship and Giving

## Chapter One: The Biblical Definition of Tithe

Among the most widespread doctrinal distortions in the contemporary church is the redefinition of the biblical tithe as ten percent of one's income. This definition has no scriptural support. The Bible's definition is precise, consistent, and entirely agricultural. It is one of the clearest examples in

modern church practice of a tradition that has displaced the text it claims to honor.

## 1.1 What Scripture Actually Defines as the Tithe

> **Leviticus 27:30, 32**
>
> *"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD... And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD."*

The tithe in Leviticus 27 is defined with complete precision: seed of the land, fruit of the tree, herd, flock. It is the agricultural increase produced from the land of Canaan by the God who gave Israel that land. Every passage in the Pentateuch that addresses the tithe confirms this definition:

> **Leviticus 27:30--33 —** Tithe of the land: seed, fruit trees, herd, flock. The tenth that passes under the rod.
>
> **Numbers 18:21--28 —** The tithe given to the Levites in return for their service at the Tabernacle. The Levites in turn tithe a tenth of the tithe to the priests.
>
> **Deuteronomy 12:6--7, 17 —** Tithes brought to the central sanctuary: grain, wine, oil, firstlings of herd and flock. Eaten before the LORD.
>
> **Deuteronomy 14:22--29 —** Annual tithe of grain, wine, and oil; firstlings of herd and flock. Third-year tithe stored locally for Levites, strangers, fatherless, and widows.
>
> **Deuteronomy 26:12--15 —** Third-year tithe — the year of tithing — given to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

The pattern is unanimous: the tithe is agricultural produce and livestock from the land of Canaan under the Mosaic covenant. A tentmaker was never commanded to tithe his tents. A carpenter was never commanded to tithe his wages. A physician, a merchant, a soldier — none of these were ever instructed to give a tenth of their income as the tithe. The attempt to translate a system designed for an Israelite theocracy operating on agricultural land granted by God into a universal percentage of modern monetary income is without a single text of scriptural support.

## 1.2 The Deuteronomy 14 Clarification

> **Deuteronomy 14:24--26**
>
> *"And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household."*

This passage is sometimes misread as evidence that the tithe could be money rather than agricultural produce. The misreading requires more attention than it typically receives. The passage does not redefine the tithe as money; it permits an Israelite who lives far from the central sanctuary to sell his tithe produce and carry the money for transport convenience — then to spend that money on tithe produce (oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink) at the destination. The money is a transport mechanism for agricultural produce, not a substitute definition of what the tithe is. The tithe remains produce; the money is simply a portable form of it for the journey.

### The Precise Definition

> *The tithe is agricultural produce and livestock increase from the land of Canaan, rendered by Israelite farmers and herders under the Mosaic covenant for the support of the Levitical priesthood and the welfare of the landless poor. It is not a universal ten-percent income tax on all believers in all ages. The two things are not the same, and the difference matters enormously for how the church teaches financial responsibility.*

## 1.3 The Three Tithes

Many biblical scholars identify three distinct tithes in the Mosaic system, which together account for a considerably larger portion of annual produce than ten percent:

- The Levitical Tithe (Numbers 18:21--28): ten percent of agricultural produce given annually to the Levites in return for their Tabernacle/Temple service. The Levites in turn tithed ten percent of this to the priests.
- The Festival Tithe (Deuteronomy 12:17--18; 14:22--27): ten percent of produce consumed by the Israelite household before the LORD at the central sanctuary, funding the annual pilgrimage feasts. Some scholars identify this as the same tithe carried to Jerusalem for the feasts; others count it separately.
- The Poor Tithe (Deuteronomy 14:28--29; 26:12--15): every third year, the tithe was stored locally and distributed to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. This was a social welfare provision built into the covenant economy. The point is not to determine the precise annual percentage of the Mosaic tithing system — which is a complex question — but to demonstrate that the Mosaic tithe was a specific, structured, multi-purpose system embedded in the land-based covenant economy of Israel. It was not a simple universal ten-percent income tax, and it cannot be mapped directly onto the financial life of a New Covenant believer

without serious distortion of both the Old Covenant system and the New Covenant's actual teaching on giving.

## Chapter Two: Malachi 3 and Its Proper Context

Malachi 3:10 — 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse' — is among the most frequently cited passages in sermons on financial giving.

It is also among the most systematically decontextualized passages in the contemporary church. A careful reading of its context does not produce the universal financial obligation it is routinely claimed to establish.

### 2.1 The Context of the Book

Malachi is the last of the writing prophets. He writes to post-exilic Israel — a community that has returned from Babylon, rebuilt the Temple, and resumed the Levitical service. His oracles address a specific community in a specific covenantal situation: Old Covenant Israel, under the Mosaic economy, operating the Levitical priesthood with its Temple storehouse, prior to the death and resurrection of Christ.

The recipients of the tithe in Malachi's context are the Levitical priests. The storehouse is the Temple storehouse. The covenant being addressed is the Mosaic covenant. The question Malachi is answering is not 'how should New Covenant believers fund their local churches?' It is 'why has God withheld his blessing from Israel?' — and the answer is that Israel has withheld the tithes owed to the Levitical system.

### 2.2 The Text in Its Context

> **Malachi 3:8--10**
>
> "*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there*

> *may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*"

The passage is a covenant lawsuit. God charges Israel with robbing him — specifically, with withholding the tithes and offerings owed under the Mosaic covenant to the Levitical priests. The storehouse is the Temple storeroom where tithe produce was held for distribution to the Levites. The blessing promised is the agricultural blessing of Deuteronomy 28 — rain, crops, produce — which was the specific covenant blessing tied to covenant obedience in the Mosaic economy.

Four contextual markers establish that Malachi 3:10 is not a universal New Covenant financial command:

1. The addressees are Old Covenant Israel ('this whole nation' — verse 9), not the New Covenant church.
2. The recipient of the tithe is the Levitical priesthood operating the Temple system — a priesthood that no longer exists. Hebrews 7:12 explicitly states that the change of priesthood requires a change of the law. The Levitical tithe law changed when the Levitical priesthood was superseded by Christ's eternal priesthood.
3. The storehouse is the Temple storehouse in Jerusalem — not a local church building. The application of 'storehouse' to the local church requires an interpretive step the text does not authorize.
4. The blessing promised is the agricultural blessing of the Deuteronomic covenant — rain and produce — which is the specific covenant economy of land-based Israel, not the spiritual blessings of Ephesians 1:3 that characterize the New Covenant.

## 2.3 The Change of Priesthood

> **Hebrews 7:12**

> "*For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.*"

The argument of Hebrews 7 is decisive for the application of Malachi 3 to New Covenant believers. The Levitical priesthood — to which the tithe was owed — has been superseded by Christ's eternal priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. The change of priesthood requires a change of the law associated with it. The tithe law was given specifically for the support of the Levitical priests who had no inheritance in the land (Numbers 18:20--21). When the priesthood changed, the specific legal structure that supported it changed with it.

This is not an argument against supporting gospel ministers financially.

Paul is explicit that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14). It is an argument against the specific claim that Malachi 3:10 establishes a binding ten-percent income tithe on New Covenant believers under threat of a financial curse. That claim requires applying an Old Covenant Levitical law directly to New Covenant believers while ignoring the change of priesthood that Hebrews explicitly identifies as requiring a change of the law.

### The Proof-Texting Warning Applied

> *To apply Malachi 3:10 as a binding financial obligation on New Covenant believers — while ignoring the change of priesthood in Hebrews 7:12, the agricultural specificity of the tithe in Leviticus 27, and the New Testament's actual teaching on giving in 2 Corinthians 9 — is to engage in precisely the selective, decontextualized proof-texting that this manual has consistently warned against. The passage must be honored in its full context or not applied at all.*

# Chapter Three: New Testament Giving

The New Testament does not leave believers without instruction on financial giving. It provides a complete theology of giving — its motivation, its measure, its manner, and its rewards. That theology is not the Mosaic tithe; it is something richer, more demanding, and more deeply rooted in the grace of God than a percentage calculation can capture.

## 3.1 The Governing Principle: Grace Giving

> **2 Corinthians 9:6--8**
>
> "*But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*"

Paul's instruction establishes four characteristics of New Testament giving:

- Proportional: sowing sparingly reaps sparingly; sowing bountifully reaps bountifully. The measure of giving is not a fixed percentage but a proportion responsive to what the Spirit is producing in the heart.
- Purposeful: 'as he purposeth in his heart.' The Greek proaireomai (προαιρέομαι) — to choose beforehand, to decide in advance. New Covenant giving is deliberate and planned, not reactive or impulsive. The believer who has purposed in his heart what to give has already submitted the question to God in prayer and reflection.
- Cheerful: 'God loveth a cheerful giver.' The Greek hilaros (ἱλαρός) — the origin of our word hilarious — describes a joy that overflows. The cheerful giver is not one who has calculated the minimum required and complied with it; they are one whose giving flows from genuine love for God and genuine delight in his kingdom.

- Not under compulsion: 'not grudgingly, or of necessity.' The word translated 'necessity' is anagke (ἀνάγκη) — compulsion, external constraint. New Covenant giving is explicitly freed from the legal compulsion that characterized the Mosaic tithe system. No financial curse attaches to the New Covenant believer who gives less than ten percent.

## 3.2 The Motivation: The Grace of God

> **2 Corinthians 8:9**
>
> "*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*"

Paul's most powerful motivation for generous giving is not the Mosaic tithe obligation or the promise of financial return. It is the grace of Christ — who, though he was rich beyond comprehension, emptied himself for the poverty of incarnation and crucifixion in order that we might be enriched. The believer who has genuinely comprehended what Christ gave up in order to give us what we needed has already received the motivation that produces generous giving without calculation.

This is Paul's pattern in 2 Corinthians 8--9: he presents the Macedonian churches as examples (8:1--5), points to Christ as the ultimate model (8:9), appeals to the grace already at work in the Corinthians' hearts (8:7), and grounds the whole appeal in the generosity of God himself (9:8--11). The appeal is entirely grace-based, entirely voluntary, and entirely motivated by what God has already done — not by a legal obligation or a financial threat.

The congregation that has been taught correctly about the grace of God — about the cost of Christ's sacrifice, about the covenant purchased in his blood, about the Spirit freely given to those who have nothing to offer — will give generously. The congregation that is taught to give through financial pressure, tithing law, and Malachi's curse will give reluctantly, resentfully, and in compliance rather than in joy. The fruit of the two approaches is

completely different, and the Scripture is explicit about which one God loves.

## 3.3 The Example of the Early Church

> **Acts 2:44--45**
>
> "*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*"
>
> **Acts 4:34--35**
>
> "*Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*"

The early church's giving exceeded any tithing percentage. They sold possessions and land. They gave until there was no lack among them. This was not the result of a ten-percent legal obligation; it was the spontaneous outpouring of a community whose hearts had been genuinely transformed by the Spirit of the living God. The Mosaic tithe law produced compliance. The Spirit of God produces what Acts 2 and 4 describe.

This is the New Testament's vision for the financial life of the covenant community: not reluctant compliance with a percentage requirement, but the generous, Spirit-led sharing of resources in response to genuine need, motivated by the grace of Christ and empowered by the Spirit he has given. It far exceeds ten percent in its ambition, and it produces something that tithing law never can: the condition in which 'neither was there any among them that lacked.'

## 3.4 Supporting Gospel Ministers

> **1 Corinthians 9:13--14**

> "*Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.*"
>
> **Galatians 6:6**
>
> "*Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.*"

The New Testament is explicit that those who give their lives to the preaching and teaching of the Word should be financially supported by those they serve. Paul draws an analogy with the Old Covenant priestly support system (verse 13) and states that the Lord has ordained the same principle for gospel ministers. This is not the Levitical tithe; it is a new-covenant application of the same underlying principle — those who labor in the Word deserve material support from those who benefit from their labor.

Paul himself chose not to exercise this right in Corinth in order to remove any appearance of financial motive from his ministry (1 Corinthians 9:15--18). But he defends the right itself vigorously, cites the Lord's own instruction (verse 14), and applies it directly to the financial responsibility of congregations toward their ministers. The congregation that pays its pastor inadequately, that treats his financial needs as a lower priority than its own institutional expenses, has not understood 1 Timothy 5:17--18: 'The labourer is worthy of his reward.'

## Chapter Four: The Prosperity Gospel Examined

The prosperity gospel — the teaching that financial giving to a ministry guarantees financial return to the giver, and that material wealth is the primary evidence of God's blessing and favor — is one of the most dangerous doctrinal distortions in the contemporary church. It misrepresents the character of God, corrupts the motivation for giving, exploits the financially

vulnerable, and directly contradicts the New Testament's teaching on wealth, poverty, and the nature of blessing.

## 4.1 What the Prosperity Gospel Claims

The prosperity gospel in its various forms typically combines several claims:

- Financial giving to a ministry — particularly the ministry doing the teaching — triggers a supernatural financial return, often expressed as a multiple ('thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold').
- Material wealth is the primary evidence of God's blessing and favor. Poverty is therefore evidence of insufficient faith, insufficient giving, or unconfessed sin.
- Malachi 3:10 establishes a binding covenant promise: bring the tithe and God will open the windows of heaven and pour out financial blessing.
- The Christian's right to financial prosperity is secured by the atonement — Christ became poor that we might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9), which is interpreted as a guarantee of material wealth.

## 4.2 What Scripture Actually Teaches

### On Wealth and Poverty

> **1 Timothy 6:6--10**
>
> "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil.*"

Paul's description of the desire for wealth — as a snare, as a source of destruction, as the root of all evil — is the diametric opposite of the prosperity gospel's promotion of financial wealth as the primary evidence of

God's blessing. The prosperity teacher who promises financial gain as the reward for correct giving has not read 1 Timothy 6 carefully. Or has read it and chosen to disregard it.

### On the Hundredfold Return

> **Mark 10:29--30**
>
> "*Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*"

The hundredfold promise of Mark 10:30 is routinely cited in prosperity gospel teaching as a financial return on giving. The full text includes 'with persecutions.' The prosperity teacher who cites the hundredfold return while omitting the persecutions has selectively quoted a text that does not support the claim being made. The return Christ promises is not primarily financial; it is communal — the family of the covenant community — and it is inseparably joined to the cost of following Christ in a world hostile to him.

### On 2 Corinthians 8:9

Paul's statement that 'though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9) is a statement about the grace of Christ's incarnation and atonement used as a motivation for generous giving. It is not a guarantee that the giver will become materially wealthy. The 'richness' Paul is describing is the spiritual enrichment of the covenant — reconciliation with God, the gift of the Spirit, the inheritance of eternal life. To flatten this into a promise of financial wealth is to extract a phrase from its context and invert its purpose: Paul uses it to motivate giving away wealth, not to promise its accumulation.

**On the Apostolic Pattern**

> **Philippians 4:11--12**
>
> "*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*"

Paul's testimony is not the testimony of a man experiencing the hundredfold financial return. He has been full and hungry, abounding and suffering need. He learned contentment in every state. The apostle who wrote the New Testament's most extensive teaching on giving lived in financial fluctuation and learned contentment as a spiritual discipline, not as a temporary condition on the way to prosperity. His testimony directly refutes the prosperity gospel's claim that correct faith and correct giving produce financial stability and abundance.

# Part Two: Separation and Syncretism

## Chapter Five: Come Out and Be Separate

The command to separation runs through the entire biblical narrative.

From the call of Abraham to leave his country and his kindred, through Israel's prohibition of Canaanite religious practices, through the prophets' warnings against syncretism, through the New Testament's command to be not conformed to this world — the consistent testimony of Scripture is that God's people are called to a distinctive identity that marks them as belonging to another kingdom.

### 5.1 The Command

> **2 Corinthians 6:14--18**

> "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*"

Paul's argument from 2 Corinthians 6:14--18 moves through five rhetorical questions and then arrives at the command. Each question names an incompatibility:

- Righteousness with unrighteousness — they have no fellowship (koinonia).
- Light with darkness — they have no communion (metoche — μετοχή, partnership, sharing).
- Christ with Belial — they have no concord (symphonesis — συμφώνησις, harmony, agreement).
- The believer with the infidel — they have no part (meris — μερίς, portion, allotment).
- The temple of God with idols — they have no agreement (synkatathesis — συγκατάθεσις, joint deposit, consent). The cumulative weight of the five questions is that the believer's identity in Christ is not compatible with the systematic entanglement Paul has in view. The command that follows — 'come out from among them, and be ye separate' — is grounded in the theological reality the questions have established, not merely in a cultural preference for religious community. The promise that closes the passage is the motivating ground for the command: 'I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.' Separation from what is unclean is not a sacrifice imposed on the believer from outside; it is the condition of the intimacy with God that the

believer already desires. The one who genuinely wants to be received by God, to know him as Father, will not require external coercion to separate from what is incompatible with his presence.

### 5.2 The Unequal Yoke

The phrase 'unequally yoked' — from heterozugeo (ἑτεροζυγέω) — refers to the Mosaic prohibition of yoking two different kinds of animals together (Deuteronomy 22:10: 'Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together'). The animals pull differently, strain against each other, and ultimately prevent the work from being done well. Paul applies this image to relationships and partnerships that bind a believer with an unbeliever in a common enterprise.

The primary application of 2 Corinthians 6:14 is not to every contact with unbelievers — Paul explicitly says in 1 Corinthians 5:9--10 that his instruction not to associate with sexually immoral people meant immoral people within the church, not immoral people in the world: 'for then must ye needs go out of the world.' The unequal yoke addresses binding partnerships that create a shared direction and shared accountability between people of fundamentally incompatible commitments.

Marriage to an unbeliever is the most frequently discussed application, but the principle extends to any partnership that gives an unbeliever governance over the believer's covenant life.

## Chapter Six: Syncretism — The Golden Calf Pattern

Syncretism is the mixing of incompatible religious elements — the attempt to worship the true God through forms, practices, or frameworks borrowed from false religion. It is the specific spiritual failure the golden calf episode in Exodus 32 exemplifies, and it is the most common form of religious corruption in the biblical narrative from the wilderness to the present.

## 6.1 The Exodus 32 Case Study

> **Exodus 32:1--5**
>
> *"And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us... And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD."*

The most important sentence in the golden calf account is Aaron's proclamation: 'To morrow is a feast to the LORD.' Israel was not intending to abandon Yahweh for a foreign god. They were attempting to worship Yahweh through a form borrowed from Egypt. The calf was an Egyptian cultic image — familiar, culturally established, immediately accessible — and Aaron consecrated it to the LORD. This is syncretism at its most seductive: it looks like worship of the right God.

God's response was immediate and catastrophic. Three thousand men died that day (Exodus 32:28). The issue was not ignorance and not malice. The issue was a fundamental confusion about how Yahweh is to be worshipped — one that imported the forms of a pagan culture into the worship of a God who had explicitly prohibited images and who had given Israel precise instructions for how he was to be approached.

## 6.2 The Test for Every Worship Practice

The golden calf account establishes the standard for evaluating every practice introduced into the worship and life of the covenant community.

The question is not:

- Is this practice old? Age does not sanctify; Baal worship was ancient.
- Is this practice familiar? Familiarity does not authorize; Egypt's calf imagery was familiar to Israel.
- Is this practice beloved? Sincerity does not substitute for obedience; Nadab and Abihu were sincere.
- Does this practice produce emotional response? Emotional intensity is not evidence of divine acceptance. The question is:
- Is this practice commanded or commended by Scripture?
- Does it originate in the revealed Word of God, or in the customs of men?
- Does it represent Yahweh accurately, or does it borrow forms from the surrounding culture and consecrate them to his name? These questions, honestly asked and honestly answered, will require many established practices — in worship, in ministry, in the church's engagement with popular culture — to be held more loosely than they presently are. They will also free the church to hold Scripture itself more tightly, with the confidence that what Scripture commends will never require apology before the God it is designed to honor.

## 6.3 Syncretism in the Contemporary Church

Syncretism in the contemporary church takes forms that are more subtle than a golden calf but not more scripturally defensible:

- Worship practices imported from entertainment culture: the use of performance aesthetics, celebrity culture frameworks, and entertainment-industry production values as the primary drivers of corporate worship design, rather than the apostolic pattern of edification, order, and reverence.
- Therapeutic frameworks displacing theological ones: the substitution of psychological self-help language for the gospel's vocabulary of sin, repentance, justification, and sanctification. The result is a church that speaks the surrounding culture's therapeutic language while the transforming categories of the gospel become progressively unfamiliar.

- Cultural accommodation in the definition of sin: the revision of what the church identifies as sin in response to cultural pressure rather than in response to scriptural exegesis. When the culture's changing definitions of acceptable behavior become the church's definitions, the church has not become more relevant; it has become more indistinct.
- The prosperity gospel as syncretism: the importation of the consumer culture's definition of the good life — health, wealth, and comfort as the primary goods — into the church's proclamation of the gospel. The result is a gospel shaped by the culture's desires rather than by the God whose character defines what is genuinely good.

## Chapter Seven: Romans 14 — Conscience, Liberty, and Its Proper Limits

The doctrine of separation must be held alongside the New Testament's equally clear teaching on Christian liberty and the handling of matters of conscience. Romans 14 provides the critical balance: not everything that differs from the practice of one believer or one congregation is a matter of syncretism or worldliness requiring separation. Some things are genuine matters of conscience on which Scripture does not prescribe a single binding position.

### 7.1 The Text

> **Romans 14:1--6**
>
> *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him... One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He*

> *that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.*"

Paul addresses two matters of conscience in Romans 14: the eating of food (almost certainly meat offered to idols, and possibly Jewish dietary distinctions) and the observance of days (voluntary observances connected with fasting or Jewish festival practices). His instruction is that these are not matters on which one believer may bind another's conscience. Each is to be 'fully persuaded in his own mind' and to act toward the Lord rather than toward the judgment of fellow believers.

## 7.2 The Limits of Romans 14

Romans 14 is frequently cited as a warrant for Christian liberty in matters beyond its actual scope. The chapter covers voluntary observances and food distinctions that Scripture does not specifically command or prohibit. It does not cover:

- Matters on which Scripture is explicit. The believer who cites Romans 14 to justify disregarding explicit apostolic instruction — on baptism, on sexual morality, on the qualifications of elders, on the Lord's Supper — has applied a passage about voluntary observances to matters of revealed command. These are not the same category.
- Practices that introduce foreign elements into the worship of God. The golden calf standard — is this commanded or commended by Scripture? — applies to worship practices regardless of whether they make individual believers feel comfortable or conflicted. Personal conscience is not the criterion for what belongs in God's assembly; Scripture is.
- Behaviors that harm the covenant community. Paul's own conclusion in Romans 14 is that liberty must be exercised with regard for the conscience of the weaker brother: 'it is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak' (verse 21). Liberty that causes another believer to stumble is liberty improperly exercised.

## 7.3 The Balance: Separation Without Isolation

The New Testament's doctrine of separation does not call the church to withdraw from all contact with the world. Christ explicitly said of his disciples: 'I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil' (John 17:15). The church is to be in the world as salt and light — present, engaged, transformative — while not being of the world in its identity and ultimate loyalty.

### ■ Unbiblical Isolation

> Withdrawing from all contact with the surrounding culture, treating every engagement with unbelievers as contaminating, refusing all cultural participation as inherently worldly. This position makes the Great Commission impossible and mistakes physical separation from people for the spiritual distinctiveness Scripture actually commands.

### ■ Unbiblical Accommodation

> So thoroughly adopting the surrounding culture's values, practices, and frameworks that the church's distinctive identity is lost. The church that can no longer be distinguished from the surrounding culture in its values, its worship, its definition of sin, and its vision of the good life has not become more effective at reaching the world; it has become indistinguishable from it.

The biblical balance is costly engagement: genuinely present in the world, speaking the gospel across every cultural barrier, serving the neighbor regardless of their beliefs — while maintaining the identity, the values, and the worship practices that mark the covenant community as belonging to another kingdom. This is the narrow way. It requires both the courage to engage and the discipline to remain distinct.

# Chapter Eight: Objections

## 8.1 On Tithing

**'Abraham Tithed to Melchizedek Before the Law — Therefore Tithing Is Pre-Mosaic and**

Binding'

**OBJECTION:**

> "*Genesis 14:20 records Abraham giving a tenth to Melchizedek before the Mosaic law was given. This establishes tithing as a pre-law practice that carries into the New Covenant.*"
>
> **ANSWER:** Abraham's single recorded gift of a tenth of war spoils to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20) is not a regular tithing practice; it is a one-time gift from the spoils of a specific military victory. There is no record of Abraham tithing his regular income, his flocks, or his agricultural produce. The argument that a one-time gift of war spoils establishes a perpetual ten-percent income tithe reads far more into the text than the text contains.

Furthermore, Hebrews 7:1--10 cites the Abraham-Melchizedek encounter not as a basis for a tithing obligation on New Covenant believers but as a typological argument that Melchizedek's priesthood was greater than the Levitical priesthood — because Abraham, the ancestor of Levi, paid tithes to Melchizedek. The passage's purpose in Hebrews is to establish Christ's superiority as high priest after the order of Melchizedek, not to establish a New Covenant tithing obligation.

**'Jesus Affirmed the Tithe in Matthew 23:23'**

**OBJECTION:**

> "*Jesus said 'these ought ye to have done' when referring to tithing in Matthew 23:23. He affirmed the tithe.*"
>
> **ANSWER:** Matthew 23:23 reads: 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.' Jesus is speaking to scribes and Pharisees who are under the Mosaic covenant, observing the agricultural tithe of the Mosaic law. His point is not 'tithing is binding on all people in all ages'; his point is 'you have honored the letter of the law's smallest provisions while violating its weightiest ones.' This is a rebuke of misplaced priority, not an affirmation of a universal tithing obligation. It is addressed to people living under the Mosaic covenant before the cross.

## 8.2 On Separation

**'Separation Is Judgmental and Drives People Away From the Gospel'**

**OBJECTION:**

> "*The church's emphasis on separation and distinctiveness makes it appear judgmental and unapproachable to people who need the gospel. We should remove barriers to entry, not create them.*"
>
> **ANSWER:** The church's distinctiveness is not a barrier to entry; it is the reason entry is meaningful. A community that is indistinguishable from the surrounding culture has nothing to offer a person who is already embedded in that culture. The gospel is not 'come be who you already are in a church

> building'; it is 'repent, be transformed, and enter a community that is genuinely different because it is genuinely under a different Lord.' The community that has lost its distinctiveness has not made itself more accessible to the gospel seeker; it has removed the visible evidence that the gospel actually transforms people.

Furthermore, Christ himself was maximally engaging with sinners and tax collectors — and simultaneously maximally demanding in his call: 'Go, and sin no more.' Genuine engagement with people who need the gospel does not require the abandonment of the standard. It requires the willingness to hold both the welcome and the standard with equal conviction and equal love.

### 'Romans 14 Means We Should Not Judge Others' Practices'

**OBJECTION:**

> "*Romans 14 teaches that we should not judge one another. This means we should not evaluate other believers' worship practices or challenge practices that differ from our own.*"
>
> **ANSWER:** Romans 14's instruction not to judge applies specifically to matters of conscience — voluntary observances and food distinctions not addressed by Scripture's explicit commands. It does not apply to the evaluation of practices that introduce unauthorized elements into the worship of God, or to the discernment of doctrine, or to the exercise of church discipline according to Matthew 18. Paul himself judged the Corinthians' Lord's Supper practice (1 Corinthians 11), the Galatians' doctrinal deviation (Galatians 1:6--9), and the Ephesian church's tolerance of false teachers (Revelation 2:2). The command not to judge in matters of conscience does not eliminate the responsibility of the church to evaluate, correct,

and maintain the apostolic standard in matters of doctrine and worship.

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# Chapter Nine: Technical Reference and Study Guide

## 9.1 Greek and Hebrew Terms

***Ma'aser (עֲשִׂירִי) —*** tithe — Hebrew; from the root 'ten'; used consistently in the Pentateuch for agricultural and livestock produce rendered under the Mosaic covenant

***Proaireomai (προαιρέομαι) —*** to purpose beforehand, to decide in advance — used in 2 Corinthians 9:7 for the deliberate, prayerful decision of the New Covenant giver; not reactive or impulsive

***Hilaros (ἱλαρός) —*** cheerful, hilarious — origin of the English word hilarious; used in 2 Corinthians 9:7 for the disposition God loves in the giver; not minimal compliance but joyful overflow

***Anagke (ἀνάγκη) —*** compulsion, necessity, external constraint — used in 2 Corinthians 9:7; New Covenant giving is explicitly freed from this; no financial curse attaches to giving below a percentage

***Heterozugeo (ἑτεροζυγέω) —*** to be unequally yoked — from heteros (different kind) and zugos (yoke); used in 2 Corinthians 6:14; drawn from Deuteronomy 22:10's prohibition of yoking unlike animals

***Metoche (μετοχή) —*** partnership, sharing, communion — used in 2 Corinthians 6:14 for what light cannot have with darkness

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***Synkatathesis (συγκατάθεσις)* —** agreement, joint deposit, consent — used in 2 Corinthians 6:16 for what the temple of God cannot have with idols

***Aphorizo (ἀφορίζω)* —** to separate, to set apart, to mark off with a boundary — used in 2 Corinthians 6:17 (come out and be separate); the same root used for Paul's apostolic calling (Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:15)

## 9.2 The Three Mosaic Tithes: Summary

**Levitical Tithe —** Numbers 18:21--28 — Annual. Ten percent of agricultural produce to the Levites for Tabernacle/Temple service. The Levites tithed ten percent of this to the priests.

**Festival Tithe —** Deuteronomy 12:17--18; 14:22--27 — Annual. Ten percent consumed by the household before the LORD at the central sanctuary. Funded pilgrimage feasts. Could be converted to money for transport.

**Poor Tithe —** Deuteronomy 14:28--29; 26:12--15 — Every third year. Stored locally and distributed to Levites, strangers, fatherless, and widows. Social welfare provision of the covenant economy.

All three tithes were defined as agricultural produce and livestock, not monetary income. None maps directly onto a universal ten-percent income obligation for New Covenant believers.

## 9.3 New Testament Giving Principles: Summary

- Proportional, not fixed-percentage (2 Corinthians 9:6)
- Purposeful — decided in advance through prayer and reflection (2 Corinthians 9:7)
- Cheerful — not grudging or legally compelled (2 Corinthians 9:7)
- Motivated by Christ's grace, not by financial return (2 Corinthians 8:9)

- Generous to the point of meeting genuine need (Acts 2:44--45; 4:34--35)
- Responsible to support gospel ministers (1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17--18)
- Free from the Mosaic tithe law's legal structure, which changed with the change of priesthood (Hebrews 7:12)

## 9.4 Study Guide

### Chapter One — The Biblical Definition of Tithe

5. List the five Pentateuchal passages that define the tithe. What do all five have in common in their description of what the tithe consists of?
6. What does Deuteronomy 14:24-26 actually permit, and what does it not redefine? Why is this clarification important for the money-tithe argument?
7. A tentmaker was never commanded to tithe his tents. Why does this observation matter for the contemporary application of tithing teaching?
8. (Advanced) Three distinct tithes are identified in the Mosaic system. What was the purpose of each? What does the multi-purpose structure of the Mosaic tithing system tell us about the covenant economy it was designed to sustain?

### Chapter Two — Malachi 3 and Its Context

9. What are the four contextual markers that establish Malachi 3:10 as an Old Covenant text not directly binding on New Covenant believers?
10. What is the argument of Hebrews 7:12? How does it apply to the tithe law specifically?
11. What does the word 'storehouse' in Malachi 3:10 refer to in its original context? What interpretive step is required to apply it to a local church building?
12. (Advanced) Malachi 3:10 promises that God will 'open the windows of heaven' in response to faithfulness in tithing. What kind of blessing is this promise describing in its original Deuteronomic context? How does this differ from the spiritual blessings described in Ephesians 1:3?

### Chapter Three — New Testament Giving

13. What four characteristics of New Testament giving does 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 establish? How does each one differ from the Mosaic tithe system?
14. What is the motivation for generous giving that Paul presents in 2 Corinthians 8:9? How does this motivation produce different fruit than a legal tithe obligation?
15. What is the New Testament's teaching on the financial support of gospel ministers (1 Corinthians 9:13-14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)?
16. (Advanced) The early Jerusalem church gave to the point that 'neither was there any among them that lacked' (Acts 4:34). This far exceeded ten percent. What produced giving at this level? What does the answer tell us about the relationship between spiritual formation and financial generosity?

### Chapter Four — The Prosperity Gospel Examined

17. What are the four main claims of the prosperity gospel identified in this chapter? Which two Scripture passages most directly contradict the claim that material wealth is the primary evidence of God's blessing?
18. The prosperity gospel cites 2 Corinthians 8:9 to promise material wealth. What is Paul's actual subject in that verse? What kind of riches is he describing?
19. What does Mark 10:29-30 actually promise to those who leave houses and lands for the gospel? How does reading the complete verse undermine the prosperity gospel's use of it?
20. (Advanced) Paul describes the desire for wealth as a snare and the root of all evil in 1 Timothy 6:6-10. How should a pastor use this passage to evaluate a ministry whose primary appeal is the promise of financial return for giving?

### Chapter Five — Come Out and Be Separate

21. Paul's five rhetorical questions in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 each name a different Greek word for the incompatibility being described. What are the five words and what does each mean?

22. What does heterozugeo mean? Where does the image come from, and what does it describe about the nature of the partnership being prohibited?
23. The promise of 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 is the motivation for the command. What is the promise? How does it function as a motivation rather than an external constraint?
24. (Advanced) Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 that his instruction to separate from immoral people meant immoral people within the church, not in the world — 'for then must ye needs go out of the world.' How does this qualification illuminate the proper scope of 2 Corinthians 6:14? What is the difference between the unequal yoke and general contact with unbelievers?

### Chapter Six — The Golden Calf Pattern

25. Aaron declared the golden calf feast 'a feast to the LORD.' Why is this the most important detail in the account for understanding syncretism?
26. The test for worship practices is not whether they are old, familiar, or beloved, but whether they are commanded or commended by Scripture. Why are age, familiarity, and emotional resonance insufficient criteria?
27. Identify one contemporary worship practice or church trend that you would evaluate using the golden calf standard. Apply the two diagnostic questions: Is it commanded or commended by Scripture? Does it originate in the revealed Word or in the customs of men?
28. (Advanced) Three thousand men died at the golden calf. The issue was not malice or ignorance but confusion about how God is to be worshipped. What does the severity of God's response tell us about how seriously he regards the introduction of unauthorized forms into the worship of his name?

### Chapter Seven — Romans 14: Conscience, Liberty, and Its Limits

29. Romans 14 addresses two specific matters of conscience. What are they? What principle governs how believers are to treat one another in these areas?

30. List the three categories of things that Romans 14 does NOT cover as identified in this chapter. Why does each fall outside the passage's scope?
31. (Advanced) Paul concludes Romans 14 by saying liberty must be exercised with regard for the conscience of the weaker brother (verse 21). How does this conclusion limit the use of Romans 14 as a warrant for unrestricted personal liberty?

#### Chapter Eight — Objections

32. The Abraham-Melchizedek objection argues that Genesis 14:20 establishes a pre-Mosaic tithing obligation. What are the two problems with this argument identified in this chapter?
33. The Matthew 23:23 objection argues that Jesus affirmed the tithe. Who is Jesus addressing? What is his actual point? Why does the context make it invalid as a universal tithing command?
34. The separation-is-judgmental objection claims that distinctive community identity drives people away from the gospel. What is the answer? What does genuine engagement with sinners look like in the New Testament model?
35. (Advanced) The Romans 14 misapplication objection claims that the command not to judge eliminates the church's right to evaluate worship practices. What three examples from Paul's own letters demonstrate that doctrinal and corporate evaluation remains fully in force?

## A Closing Word: Holding All Things Loosely Before God

The two subjects of Book Eleven — what we do with what we have and where we stand in relation to the world — are ultimately the same question asked in two registers. Both are questions about where the heart's ultimate loyalty lies.

The believer who gives generously, cheerfully, and without calculation has demonstrated that their trust is in the God who provides, not in the resources they retain. They have held their possessions loosely before the

God who gave them, and in doing so have enacted the truth that the kingdom of God is more real to them than their bank account. The believer who gives grudgingly, calculating the minimum required, nervously checking whether they have met the obligation — that believer has not yet fully believed the promise of 2 Corinthians 9:8: 'God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.' The believer who maintains their separation from the world's defining commitments — who will not borrow the world's forms to worship the God who prohibited borrowed forms, who will not accept the world's definitions of the good life as the measure of God's blessing, who will not trade the costly distinctiveness of the covenant community for the comfort of cultural acceptance — that believer has demonstrated that their identity is genuinely in another kingdom. Not by withdrawal from the world, but by remaining distinctively themselves within it.

Both callings are costly. Both are possible only by the Spirit. Both are the visible evidence of what the gospel has actually produced in the people it has claimed.

> **Matthew 6:19--21**
>
> "*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*"

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*Continue to Book Twelve:*

**Forgiveness, Rewards, and the Judgment to Come**